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SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [PGOV](#) [KMDR](#) [SI](#) [NATO](#)

SUBJECT: SLOVENIA: "FORMER SOVIET BLOC" RHETORIC ILL-RECEIVED (AND FOR GOOD REASON)

REF: LJUBLJANA 0259

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The Slovenian media have reported extensively on erroneous references to Slovenia as part of the "former Soviet Bloc" made during recent NATO accession ceremonies. Slovenes take umbrage at this historical inaccuracy and the lack of understanding it demonstrates as to how former Non-Aligned and Warsaw Pact countries differ in their perspectives, priorities, and philosophies. Lumping of Slovenia together with the other six new NATO Allies under a single "post-Soviet" rubric has unfortunately added a bitter twist to many otherwise positive media commentaries on NATO accession. Allies must learn from this experience, in order to better manage Slovenian public opinion and policy makers, but also in order to better prepare for the next group of potential invitees. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) On March 30, Slovenia's commercial POP TV carried a story during its main evening -news broadcast on Slovenia's accession to NATO that contained a brisk commentary by U.S. correspondent Natasa Briski on American misunderstanding of Slovenian history. Briski noted that "the U.. media have continuously reported that [the current round of NATO accession] concerned only the countries of the former Soviet Bloc." She also reported that "Based on what Bush said, we can also conclude that on this historic occasion the President's speechwriters didn't bother to trouble themselves with Slovenia's history." The report came n the heels of POP TV's previous day's coverage aking the same point.

¶3. (U) Slovenia's leading print daily "Delo" also carried a report on Mrch 31 by its U.S.-based correspondent Ervin Hlanik-Milharcic quoting President Bush's statement tht "When NATO was founded, the people of these seen nations were captives to an empire." Milharcc then sarcastically commented on the President' statement by claiming that "In these few sentenes before the White House, Bush was able to discoer a historical common denominator." Left-of-center "Vecer" also points out in a March 31 report about the White House ceremonies that "in President Bush's words these nations were captives of an empire."

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: Although the Slovenian media will generally find fault with U.S. policymakers whenever possible, we certainly are not doing ourselves any favors by portraying Slovenia as a former member of the Soviet Bloc. Such historical inaccuracies grate particularly harshly on Slovenian ears and exacerbate sensitivities that stem from the country's size and relative obscurity on the world stage. Slovenes take pride in the fact that Yugoslavia was never a member of the Warsaw Pact and that it jealously guarded its independence from Moscow. Historically conditioned fears of imperial subordination make it appropriate that this distinction (always) be acknowledged.

¶5. (SBU) COMMENT Cont: It is also important for policy-makers in Washington and other Allied capitals to appreciate the implications of the proudly non-aligned mindset that Slovenia brings to the NATO table. Average Slovenes value rather than repudiate their Cold War orientation, feeling a certain sense of superiority for having been "above" taking sides. They carry little emotional baggage about relations with Russia and are likely to make reasoned, practical decisions about whether/how to work with Russia in the NATO context. They feel less of a sense of historical obligation to the original NATO members, other than that generated by NATO's role in ending conflicts in the region. They also still retain neutrality-based instincts about eschewing military conflict, and the old view of NATO and the Warsaw Pact as two sides of the same coin. This means that the Slovenian population (and some policy-makers) will approach policy issues differently and will likely have a different set of knee-jerk reactions than other new Allies will. It also means that Slovenia may be able to offer NATO insightful advice about managing enlargement in other former Yugoslav countries. END COMMENT.

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